

Commentary (ROUGH)  
Lines 260-360  
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*260-286 – Walter reveals to Hildegund his plans for escape; he instructs her to steal armor and arm rings, to fashion shoes for them, and to requisition fish hooks from the smiths for fishing, and to do this stealthily over the course of a week; his plan is to bury the entire court in drink, allowing them to flee westwards once all are incapacitated.*

**260**            **inquit in aurem** i.e. “whisper”

**263-65**            Cf. 334-339, where Walter’s arms and armor are described in greater detail. Note that Walter here specifies only armor – i.e. defensive gear – and not offensive weapons. Note too that Walter requests the king’s own armor. The gear requested is the king’s *galea*, “helmet,” and *tunica*, “byrnie,” which is further described as a *trilix lorica*, “three-fold cuirass” that “bears the mark of smiths.” See Althof for the significance of smith-work in so-called Germanic culture. Ziolkowski 2008 discusses the physical nature of some of these arms in an early medieval context. The *scrinia* are presumably large casks. In medieval Latin *scrinium* came to describe the cases in which books were held, and by extension archives generally. They are also called *vasis* in line 269.

**264**            **assero** perhaps simply “I mean” as the Kratz 1984 translation suggests, i.e. clarifying which *tunica* exactly ought to be stolen (“I mean the three-fold cuirass...”), but *assero* can also have a more symbolic meaning. It was originally a technical term for the liberation of a slave, but it also refers to any act of appropriation or claim of ownership. In line with the fact that Walter is taking the *king*’s own armor, this technical or juridical sense of the verb may be significant, since he is called the defense of the kingdom. This supports Ospirin’s fears that Walter’s departure means the destruction of the Huns.

**265**            **armillarum** “arm bands”; rings of precious metal were a common currency for the remuneration of warriors in early medieval kingship; see Maddicott “Power and Prosperity in the Age of Bede and Beowulf”, *Proceedings of the British*

*Academy* (2002) for some of the intricacies of early medieval kingship; compare also Alfred the Great's translation of Boethius (late ninth century): "In the case of the king, the resources and tools with which to rule are that he must have his land fully manned: he must have praying men, fighting men, and working men. You know also that without these tools no king may make his ability known...[and] he must have the means of support for his tools, the three classes of men. These, then, are their means of support: land to live on, gifts, weapons, food, ale, clothing, and whatever else is necessary..." (Keynes and Lapidge 1983, 132). Arm bands are among these remunerative necessities.

**268**            **coturnum** the word *coturnus* from the name of the shoe (buskin) often refers to a tragic actor who wears the buskin; possible significance? [also, what does it mean that he says *fac de more*? Does Hildegund often make shoes?]

**273**            It is surely significant that in his instructions to Hildegund Walter does not ask for any weapons, but instead requests fishing gear. The matter is complicated by *auceps*, but of course fishing in the middle ages carries a strong resonance of Christianity, since the apostles are entreated to fish for the souls of men. In the later middle ages, canonical writers deemed it proper for a religious to fish, but improper for one to hunt.

**278**            **satrapis** here evidently referring to some high level of the nobility; the poet occasionally uses it to describe a king.

**280**            **sepelire** "to bury" but used in poetry for the ruin of cities. Elements of Walter's preparation foreshadow the destruction of the "city" of the Pannonians that will be the result of his disappearance (as with the loss of the king's own armor above).

**285**            **violentia potus** [to do: consider the significance of *violentia* as opposed to *vis*]

**286**            **occiduas...partes** [to do: examine the frequency of phrases like this in contemporary poetry; this phrasing is characteristic of, e.g., the *Gesta Berengarii* which used a great deal of Statius, and other late ninth century or early tenth century writers who had reason to see the world in parts once more in the wake of the Carolingians]

287-323 – *Hildegund does as she is commanded; Walter arranges a feast of great luxury; the feast begins; the king sits at table with his most trusted men, including Walter multiple courses are served; exhorted to drink without cease all pass out in drunkenness.*

**288-323** Cf. the opening of the book of Esther, when king Xerxes arranges a great feast in Susa “that he might show the riches of the glory of his kingdom, and the greatness, and boasting of his power” (1.4); many of the depictions of dishes and table settings appear to be modeled on this scene in the Bible, in which Xerxes, drunk, summons his wife Vashti to dinner; when she refuses, she is deposed, thus setting Xerxes up to hunt for a new queen (who will be Esther). [Although it is clear that these parallels are strong, as they are when Hildegund’s role at court is first described, I am not entirely sure what to make of them]

**290** **Luxuria in media residebat denique mensa** “and then Luxury settled in the middle of the table”; contrast with line 315 where another vice, Drunkenness (*Ebrietas*), dominates throughout the hall. We seem to progress from one (lesser?) vice to another much worse one.

**291-295** See Althof for much wrangling about the significance of the order in which people are sitting; how they are sitting; how people sit in Germanic settings, etc.

**293** **bissus comspit et ostrum** Cf. Esther 1.6: “And there were hung up on every side sky coloured, and green, and violet hangings, fastened with cords of silk, and of purple, which were put into rings of ivory, and were held up with marble pillars. The beds also were of gold and silver, placed in order upon a floor paved with porphyry and white marble: which was embellished with painting of wonderful variety” (“et pendebant ex omni parte tentoria aerii coloris et carpasini et hyacinthini sustentata funibus **byssinis** atque **purpureis** qui eburneis circulis inserti erant et columnis marmoreis fulciebantur lectuli quoque aurei et argentei super pavimentum zmaragdino et pario stratum lapide dispositi erant quod mira varietate pictura decorabat”).

- 296**            **accubitus** presumably these are not meant to be reclining seats are were used by the Romans, but perhaps benches. See Althof.
- 297**            **resudat** possibly from the spiciness of the food; but the parallels to Prudentius warn us that this whole passage may be a moral reminder against drunkenness and luxury, with Esther as a reference text (King Xerxes humiliates himself because he has had too much to drink).
- 299**            **exquisitum fervebat migma per aurum** Cf. Esther 1.7: “And they that were invited, drank in golden cups, and the meats were brought in divers vessels one after another. Wine also in abundance and of the best was presented, as was worthy of a king's magnificence.” (bibebant autem qui invitati erant **aureis poculis** et aliis atque aliis vasis cibi inferebantur vinum quoque ut magnificentia regia dignum erat abundans et praecipuum ponebatur).
- 301**            **pigmentatus** the idea seems to be that the contents were spicy, not that the vessel was painted.
- 308**            **nappam...peractam** Cf. Esther 1.6-7 again for the scene of opulence.
- 313**            Cf. line 228, where Walter hands back to Hildegund an empty cup. It is worth noting that in Esther 1.8 the king does *not*, in contradistinction to Walter's party, compel those unwilling to drink to drink (*nec erat qui nolentes cogeret ad bibendum*).
- 315**            **Ebrietas** contrast with line 290. Where *luxuria* formerly reigned, now *ebrietas* holds sway. The parallels with the story in the book of Esther are striking, for it is in the context of heavy drinking (*cum rex esset hilarior et post nimiam potionem*) that the king orders his wife Vashti to parade in front of the whole court to show off her beauty, a request that she refuses.
- 320**            **humotenus** “groundwards” a word that the Waltharius poet is fond of using (later to describe Walter falling to the ground in penitent prayer), and which is either a neologism or exceedingly rare (it is absent from the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and from several other Latin dictionaries), though its elements are clear enough.

**322-3** [why mention the fire? Note scenes in Germanic literature where halls are attacked or burned under cover of night or after great drinking parties (e.g. Beowulf)]

*324-360 – Walter and Hildegund flee; Walter takes his horse Lion; they pack food supplies and Walter is armed from head to toe in arms and armor; Hildegund carries the fishing tools; fearfully, they make their way through the wilderness, while the people of the city remain asleep.*

**326** **Leonem** [to do: check Bible for any ulterior significance of this term]

**328** This line is taken *verbatim* from Aen. 4.135 where it describes Dido's horse; what might be the significance, if any, of this transformation? [I mean in terms of the play with gender roles discussed by Dronke 1971, for instance]

**331** **iteri** [to do: check where else this form appears in contemporary poetry]

**modicella cibaria** The moderation in eating and the planning for a fish based diet suggest, compared especially to the large feast, a Lenten fast. [This juxtaposition, between the Lentan, fasting imagery of fishing, modest supplies of food, and even the general penitential associations of an arduous journey, and the feast ruled by *luxuria* and *ebrietas* may be worth pressing]

**333** **more gigantis** [to do: pursue biblical account of giants in Genesis; giants in PL, etc.]

**334-339** Here we have a fuller depiction of Walter's arms and armor than at 263-5 when he is merely asking Hildegund for the king's armor. The descriptions of the different pieces of Walter's panoply (crested helmet, greaves of gold, two-edge sword, second one-edged sword, spear, shield) are taken from earlier poetry, but may be linked to the early medieval weaponry that we know from written and archaeological sources.

See Ziolkowski 2008. Note the attention which the poet gives to the side on which the sword is girded.

**342**            **virgam...columnam** early medieval queens were given a *virga* as insignia of rule; [look into the significance of hazel wood]

**343-4**            Again the fishing imagery, evocative of Christianity generally and fasting specifically, seems significant especially in contrast to the drunkenness that we have just left. Cf. the exhortation quoted by the *Regula Benedicti* in the section (40) dedicated to the diet of monks: “Make sure that your hearts are not weighed down by over-indulgence” (Luke 21.34).

**345**            **gravatus erat...undique telis** could there be a note of criticism in this description of Walter as *gravatus*? In the context of the feast previously described, cf. Luke 21:34: “And take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life: and that day come upon you suddenly” (*attendite autem vobis ne forte graventur corda vestra in crapula et ebrietate et curis huius vitae et superveniat in vos repentina dies illa*).

**346**            **suspectamque...pugnam** *suspectus* often used in this sense by the poet: something anticipated with fear.

**351-3**            The fearfulness of the two travelers is surely significant; perhaps it may refer to their guilt; but perhaps, in light of the Christian/Lenten imagery, there is also a symbolic sense as well: e.g. Psalm 2: *servite domino in timore*.

**355**            On one basic level, the couple’s avoidance of human habitations (towns, fields, etc.) is simply the result of their fear of discovery, as the poet explains. On a possible allegorical level, their behavior might be pressed for its similarities to monastic or cenobitic activities, or at least penitential ones: avoiding human habitations, cleaving to the wilderness, eating fish (*Regula Benedicti* 40: “Everyone, apart from those who are very weak, should abstain completely from eating the meat of four-footed animals”).

**359**            **ad medium lucis siluit recubando sequentis** [to do: see if the *Regula Benedicti* has anything to say about sleeping in after partying too hard; there are some early medieval monastic rules that specify that if a monk has slept in from drinking too much, he can be absolved so long as his abbot ordered him to drink]